

Matthew 18:7 (Richard Holden) 68037

Bible Treasury: Volume 12, It Must Needs Be That Offences Come (18:7)

Q. Whose are the “offenses” in this word? Offenses in the world, or in the church? R. H.

A. 1. To judge from the scope of the chapter, it would seem to have to do with “them that are within,” rather than with “them that are without.” Its counsels and warnings are addressed by the Lord to “the disciples,” not to “the multitude.” It is manifestly offenses on their own part that these are admonished to deal with in verses 6, 9; and if the denunciation against the offenders of the little ones in verse 6 be somewhat general in character, the warning of verse 10, with the parable employed to enforce it, are clearly for the admonition of the disciples.

Of the bearing of verses 15-20 on questions within the assembly, there can, I presume, be no doubt, and Peter's question in verse 21, “How oft shall my brother sin against me?” along with the Lord's own application in verse 35, “If ye from the heart forgive not everyone his brother,” determine with sufficient precision the application of the intervening parable.

2. “The word “woe,” though frequently denunciatory, as in the last clause, is not always so, but is also commiserative, as in Matt. 24:19, Mark 13:17, Luke 21:23, Rev. 8:13; 12:12.

3. If I apprehend the word ἀπό (from out of) aright, as indicating rather the source from whence, or occasion of, than the procuring cause or ground, this would confirm the thought that the world is not here the object of denunciation on account of its own misdeeds, but of commiseration, in view of evils to arise to it from, or out of, offenses elsewhere.

4. If σκάνδαλον be that part of a trap or snare, by contact with which the game brings down the trapfall or causes the snare to close upon it, nothing could be more graphically descriptive of the effect upon the world (as well as on many within) of scandals in the professing church of God. Such “offenses” are not in themselves the snares in which Satan entraps souls, but they are truly to thousands the stumbling-blocks or touch-pins which give effect to the snares, and serve to precipitate into the pitfalls of unbelief and infidelity.

5. Finally, this view finds confirmation in the following clause of the verse: “It must needs be that offenses come.” If offenses in the world were in question, they were already around on every hand; but if offenses in that new thing about to be set up, the assembly, or church of God, be the matter in hand—that thing in which, according to its ideal or theory, no offense should be found, then how needful and appropriate the warning.

In view of these things, I lean to the conclusion that the “offenses” here are offenses in the professing church, and that the opening “woe!” of the verse is a long-drawn sigh from the Lord's loving heart over the foreseen confusion among His own, and the consequent break-down and obscuration of the testimony that ought to have shone as the light of the world in His absence, that through it the world might have believed that the Father had sent Him. (John 17:21.) Alas! alas how dreadfully prophetic has that compassionate “woe!” been—how much of blessing has been hindered by the scandals the world has seen among professing Christians! R. H.